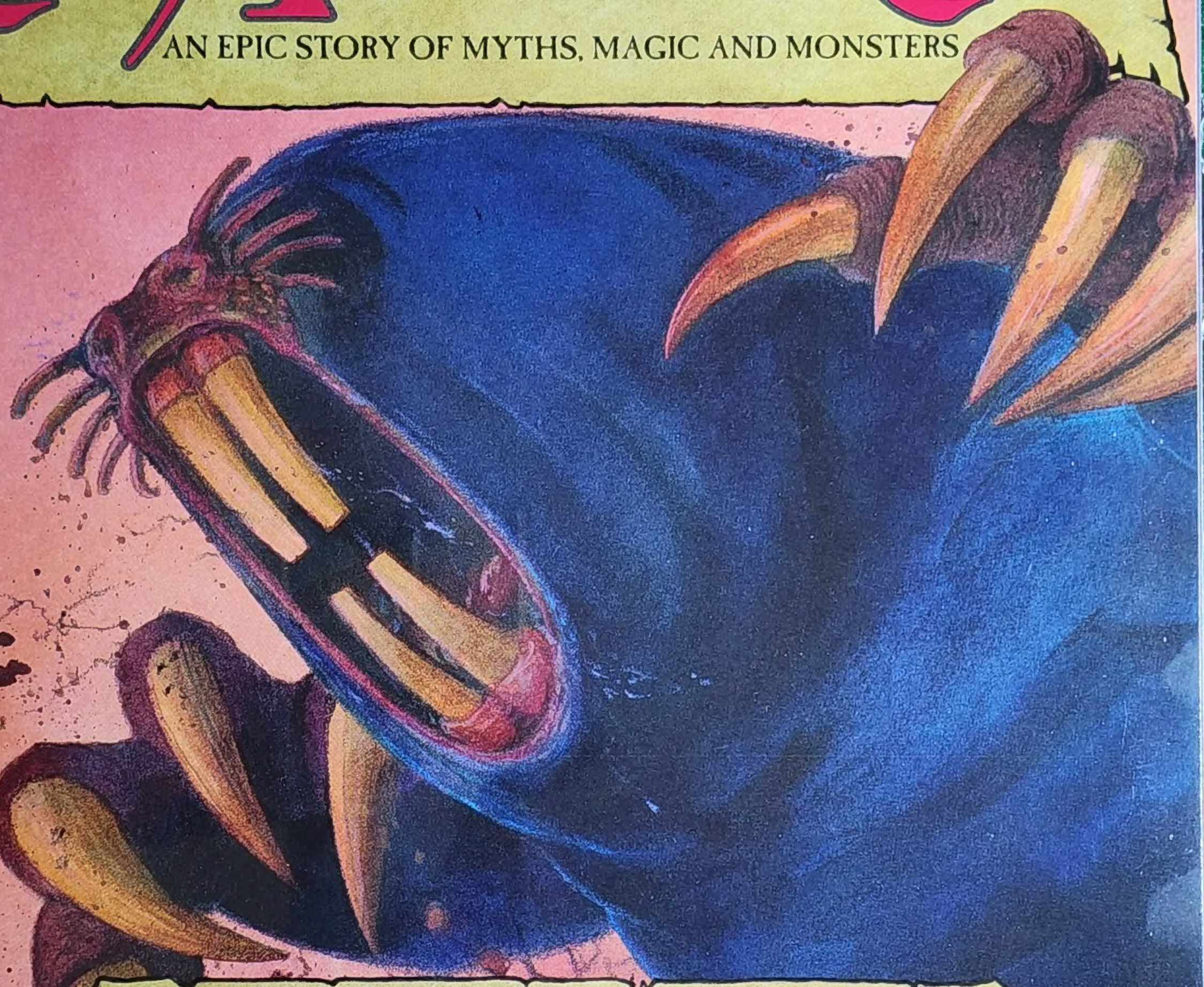
A MARSHALL CAVENDISH COLLECTION 14 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS



14 Hulkan, the Mole Monster

Under Attack from the Mud Warriors

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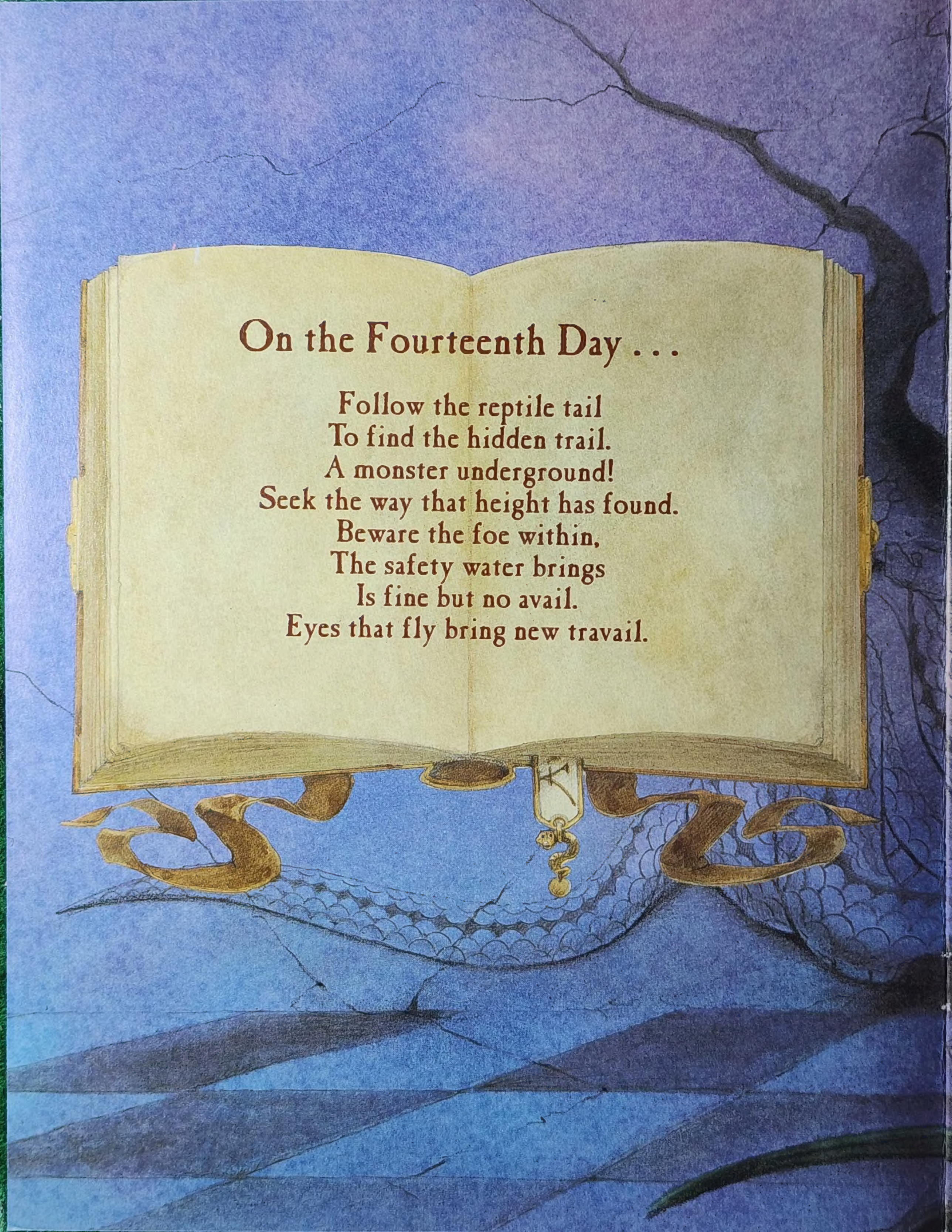
From a story by Frank Graves

Juliet Heller



On the Fourteenth Day . . .

Follow the reptile tail
To find the hidden trail.
A monster underground!
Seek the way that height has found.
Beware the foe within,
The safety water brings
Is fine but no avail.
Eyes that fly bring new travail.

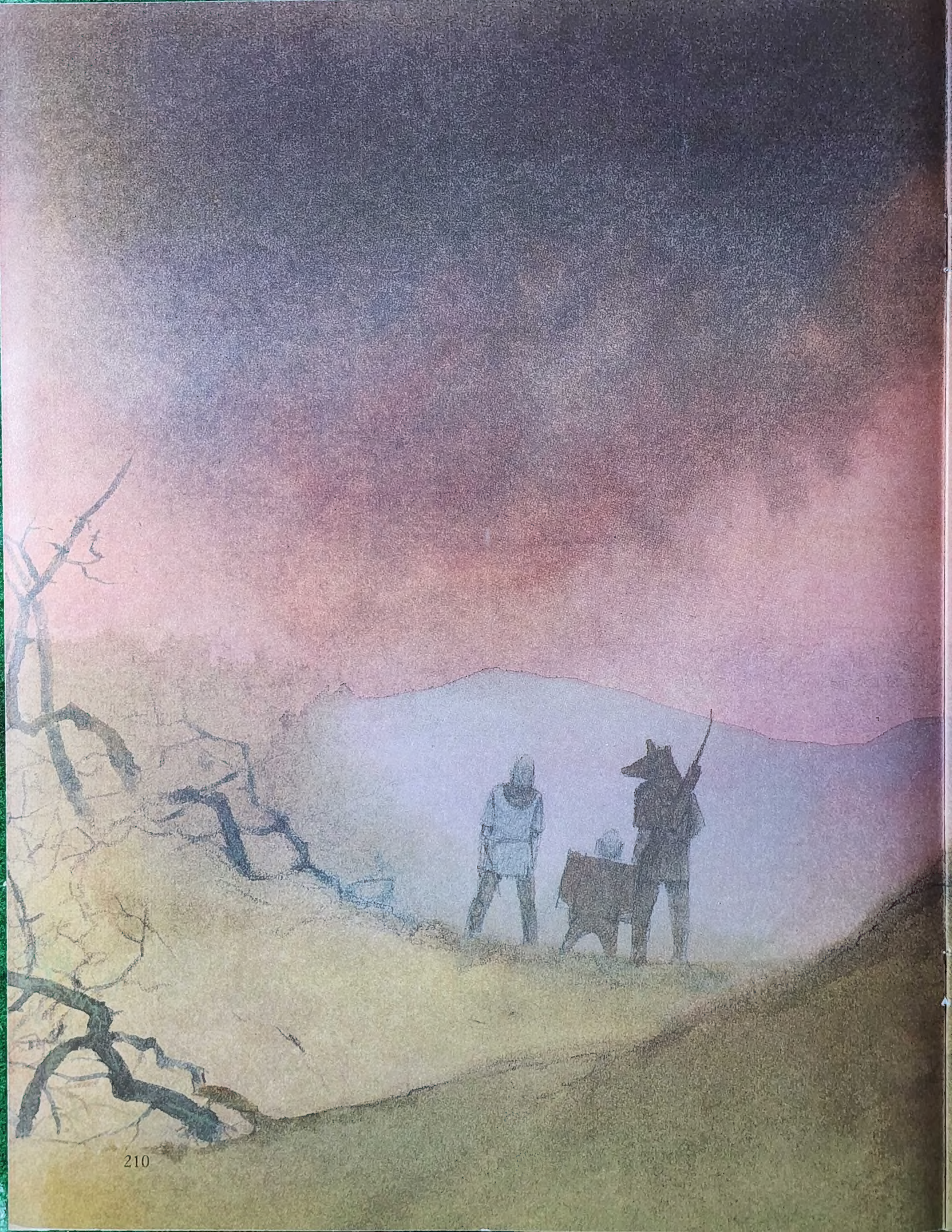
Salty sweat stung Richard's eyes as he looked around the chamber. The cracks in the walls, floor and ceiling were widening and there seemed to be fewer reptiles than before. Then he looked at his companions. Orkan had stopped his wild laughter, and Kika was calm, but Melek was staring round in panic. Richard was about to speak, when out of the corner of his eye, he saw a tail disappearing through one of the larger cracks.

"Over here!" he shouted to the others. "The lizards have found a way out."

They ran after the reptiles and entered a long, rough-hewn tunnel. It shook and juddered and the heat was still intense.

The four ran along, jostling against reptiles that scrabbled and bellied their way along the narrow corridor. Desert sand poured through breaks in the wall, forcing them to tunnel their way on all fours.

Eventually the tremors grew



fainter, and the sandy floor turned first to a peat-like loam and then to dark, sticky earth. A faint glimmer of daylight came from ahead and they sprinted the last steps to freedom, bursting out on to a hillside. They had reached the mountains they had first seen from the other side of the desert.

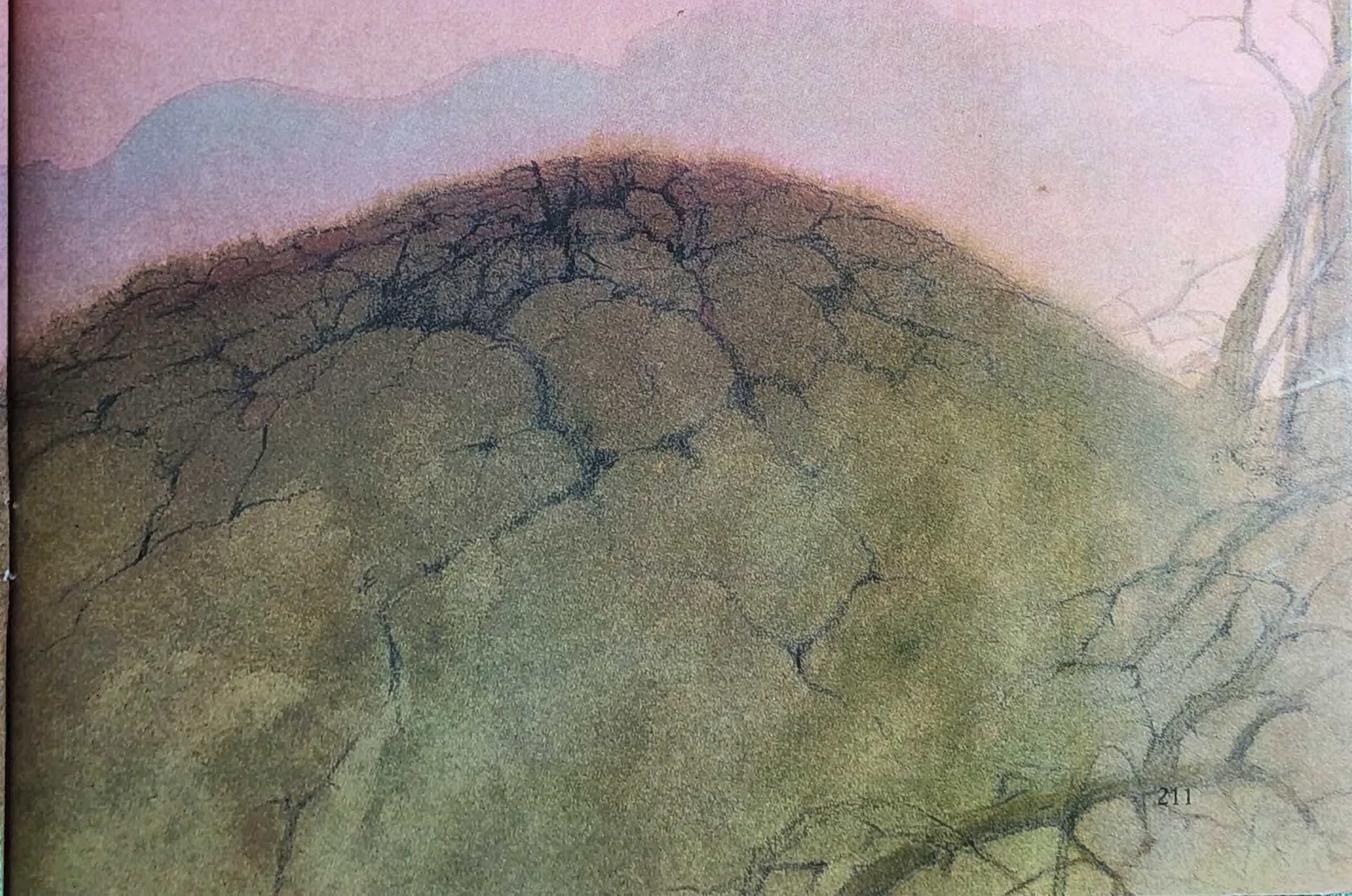
A heavy rumble shook the air. The three turned just in time to see the final death throes of Sand City. A light flickered amid the oily pall, then expanded into a brilliant fireball. It flashed in all directions, levelling the entire city with the finality of a nuclear blast, then blinked out with the same speed with which it had appeared, leaving only a rising column of sand and ashes to mark the grave of Dragora and his scorpion guards.

Kika turned to Richard. "I'll be off now," she said. "I'm taking the reptiles back to the Ancestral City. We'll need all the reinforcements we can get." Then she lowered her voice to a whisper.

Secret warning

"Watch out for Orkan. I think something's happened to him. I don't know what . . . maybe it's the effect of that scorpion sting." She raised her voice again. "Well, goodbye and good luck with your quest." Then she gathered the reptiles, and set out to join Juroot.

As the small band worked its way down the hill, Richard thought about Kika's warning. Then he shook his head. No, Orkan was all right. After a while, the trio stopped to rest and Melek read out the prophecy. "Well, the first part's been fulfilled," Richard said, and took the book from Melek to have another read. He was



about to hand the book back when the ground began to shake. At the same time the three heard a rhythmic thudding sound. They turned to see a mound building up from the ground behind them.

Tunnelling torpedo

The mound grew bigger by the second, and the three realized that the thudding noise was the sound of hard digging. Fresh earth sprayed into the air, as if a volcano of mud was exploding. Then, with a final bout of activity, the digging ceased.

The trio stared wide-eyed as a sleek, black shape began to work its way out of the top of the mound. Slowly, more and more of the creature emerged.

Its glossy black coat shone in the sunlight, parting at the mouth to show long, spade-shaped teeth. Two stubby arms ended in sharp-clawed paddle-like paws. As far as the three could see, it had no eyes, but there were two minuscule nostrils that twitched, sniffing the air. On either side of the smooth head were tiny holes that might have been ears.

"Hulkan!" Melek whispered in terror. "The mole monster! I've heard about him. He can't see us, but he can smell us, and he hears every sound. His teeth and claws can rip us to shreds."

Without another word, the three started to tiptoe away from the huge monster. Their first movement brought Hulkan's snout swinging round towards them. His nostrils flared as he caught the whiff of fresh prey.

Dodging danger

The companions broke into a run, but the bracken through which they had walked easily became a nightmare of tangles when they tried to run. Richard was still carrying the *Book of Prophecies*, and it slowed him down even more. As sinuous green growths snatched at his legs, he shouted to Orkan, "You distract Hulkan! I'll work my way round behind."

He drew the dagger Juroot had given him, expecting Orkan to do likewise and distract Hulkan's attention. To his surprise, he saw Orkan turn away and flounder unsteadily through the bracken.

"Come back!" Richard called. He and Melek stumbled after Orkan.

The air filled with the sound of

chuckling. Richard looked back to see Hulkan surrounded by lots of little brown figures. The mole monster was picking up clods of fresh damp earth and forming them into live figures with arms and legs. As he placed each little model on the ground, it stretched, tested its limbs and darted off.

Mud warriors

Horrified by what he had seen, Richard struggled on after Orkan. Melek tried to follow, but he caught his ankle in a spiny piece of bracken. Frantically, he tried to free it.

Meanwhile, the little figures scurried from Hulkan's hands, darting easily beneath the bracken fronds. Hulkan was creating an army of mud warriors. The creatures soon outstripped their quarry and began to form a half-circle ahead of Richard and Orkan. The warriors clung haphazardly to each other, moulding into a mounting wall of damp earth.

Orkan was the first to encounter the mud barrier. Richard cannoned into him, dropping the *Book of*

Prophecies to the ground as he skidded to a stop.

Richard began hacking at the wall with his dagger, but his blade made as much impact as if he had cut into the earth itself. The wall was getting bigger, as more of Hulkan's minions piled on. It was getting longer too. Now mud walls were rising on all sides. Richard and Orkan were being enclosed in a circle of mud.

A BRIGHT IDEA

In the meantime, Melek had freed himself from the bracken, and had seen his companions' predicament. He tried to think what Richard would do in his place. Then he had an idea.

Melek ran to a nearby tree and in no time, he was looking down on his friends from one of the topmost branches. He scanned the surrounding area for water.

Within the mud circle, Richard was at a loss. There seemed to be no escape. He clasped his amulet and prayed for Golan's help. Almost immediately, he sensed the Guardian's voice, telling him to look for safety beyond water. The circle was almost complete. Richard could see nothing.

High in the tree, Melek had spotted a stream tumbling through a gorge some way beyond the mud wall. He could also see Hulkan making more and more mud warriors. They scurried from his paws, piling on to the wall that towered above Richard and Orkan.

Escape route

Then Melek saw something that got him so excited he almost toppled off the branch. There was a hole where the wall had not been joined. If they were quick, Richard and Orkan could escape through it.

He shouted down to Richard, directing him to the breach in the wall. Then he started on his perilous descent and, after several worrying moments, he landed safely on the ground.

Absorbed in his task, Hulkan never noticed Richard and Orkan crawling though the breach in the

wall. His tiny warriors did. The mud barrier started to ripple and move. One by one, the little creatures began to disentangle themselves, scrambling over each other to plug the hole.

They were too late. Richard and Orkan had already climbed over the few mud warriors that barred their way. Once through, they headed for Melek, who was shouting for them to follow him. Behind them, Hulkan's warriors struggled to unform the wall and chase after their prey.

The ground grew rockier, the undergrowth thinner, and the trio's speed was picking up when a roar of anger told them that Hulkan had discovered his loss.

Heading towards the fleeing companions, the mole monster tunnelled underground like a speeding torpedo, until he came to a full stop against solid

bedrock. Hulkan surged to the surface, throwing up a mound of earth, and waved his tiny warriors on.

Richard turned to see the mud army streaming past the black form of their furious master. First one, then another of the mud warriors threw themselves at Richard, splattering on to his leg with a wet smacking noise. He scraped them off with his hands and stamped them underfoot into an unrecognizable mess.

Heading for the rocks

"Jump into the water!" Richard yelled as he ran to catch up with the others.

They were at the top of a sheer-sided gorge carved into the rock. The drop seemed endless, and there was no telling how deep the water was below.

"Maybe we should try and find a safer place," Orkan suggested.

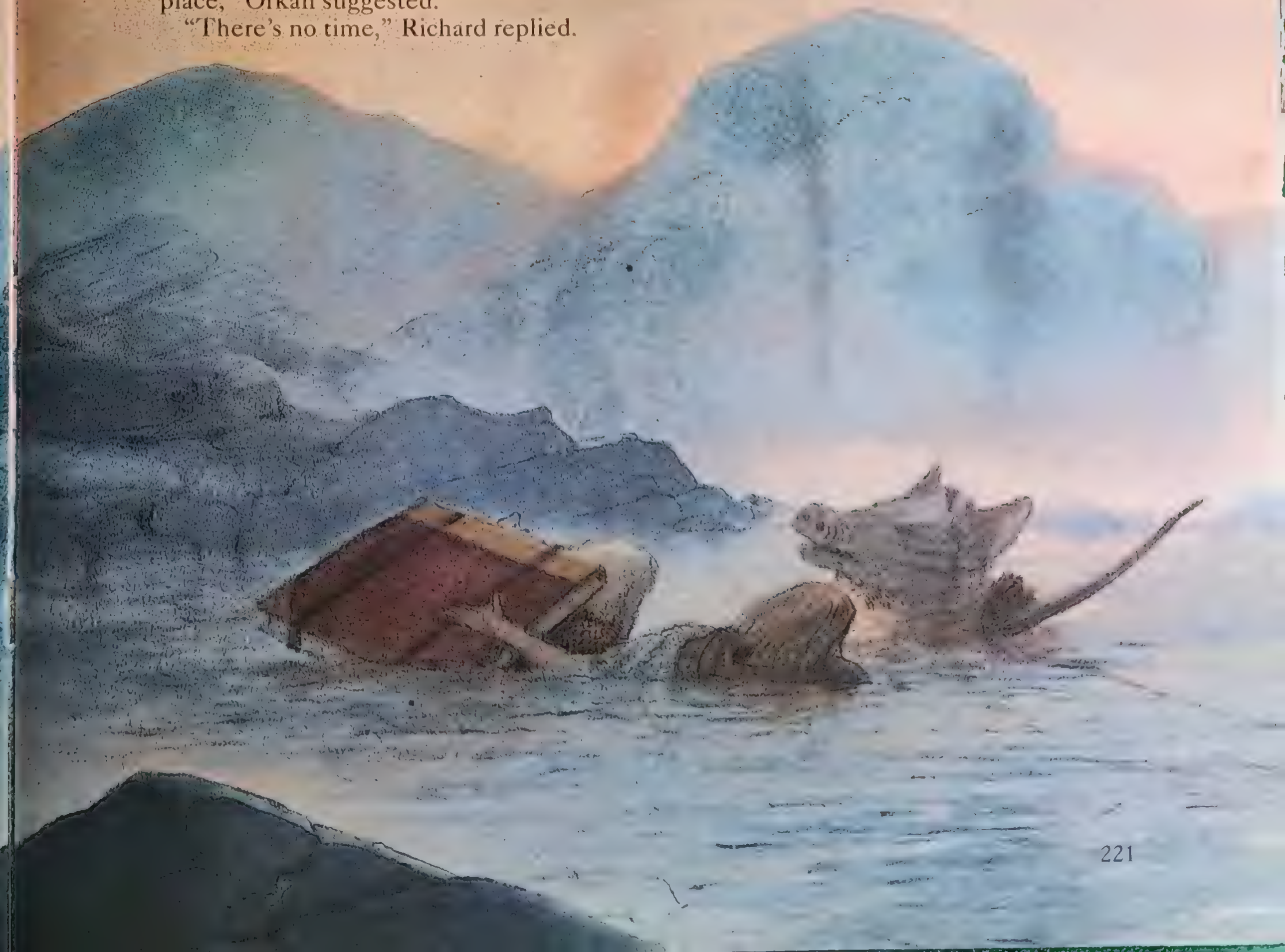
"There's no time," Richard replied.

"Wait, let me take back the book," Melek said, swinging the volume on to his shoulders. He somehow felt safer when he was in charge of the precious volume.

Grabbing each companion by an arm, Richard pulled them over the precipice.

Their stomachs lurched as they fell feet-first through the air. The water rushed up at them and then they plunged down into the whirling current. It was a clean jump, which was good because, from that height, a belly-flop would have split them open like ripe melons. Luckily, the stream was deep enough to break their fall – although Richard's legs jarred painfully as he struck the riverbed.

As the trio hit the water, Hulkan's mud warriors were reaching the edge of the gorge. They stopped for a while, then one by one they launched themselves into the



void. Their bodies touched the water with loud smacking sounds and they started swishing in the current.

Up ahead of the mud warriors, the current was stronger than the trio had expected. When they bobbed to the surface, they were already a fair distance from where they had jumped in, and were being carried towards a vicious set of rapids.

Orkan, the worst swimmer of the three, came off best. Caught by an eddy in the flow, he was swept straight on to a gravel bed on the opposite bank at the end of the gorge. Richard was able to join him there with some difficulty. Poor Melek had a harder time. He was on the point of disappearing down the rapids when Richard grasped the *Book of Prophecies*' bindings and hauled him to safety.

They lay back, too exhausted to move. Their ears were filled with the crash and thunder of the stream as it powered its way out of the gorge. The noise made normal speech almost impossible.

"Look!" Melek shouted, pulling at Richard's sleeve, and pointing back up the gorge.

Richard could not make out his shouted words, but he looked where Melek was pointing. Hulkan's mud warriors were leaping lemming-like over the precipice into the water.

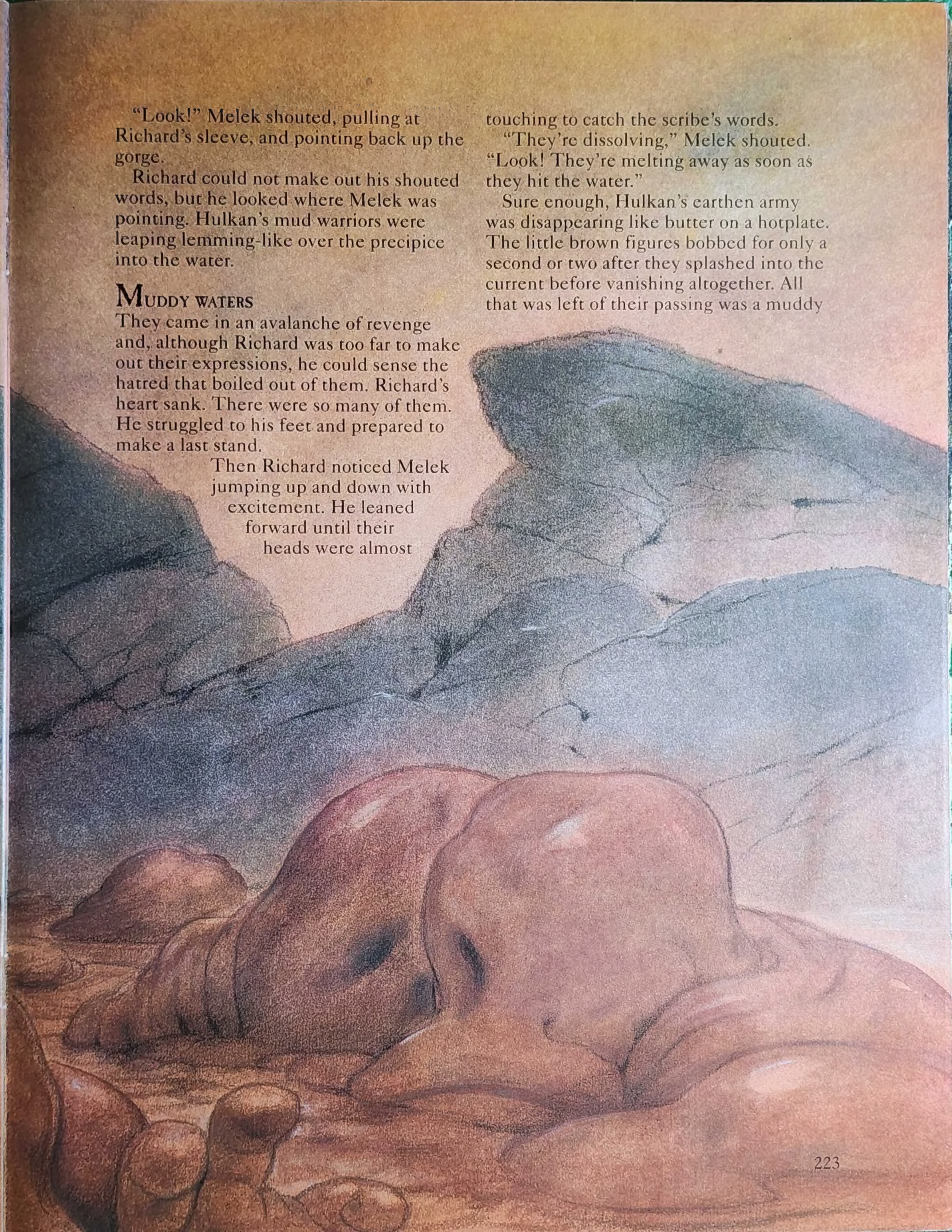
Muddy waters

They came in an avalanche of revenge and, although Richard was too far to make out their expressions, he could sense the hatred that boiled out of them. Richard's heart sank. There were so many of them. He struggled to his feet and prepared to make a last stand.

Then Richard noticed Melek jumping up and down with excitement. He leaned forward until their heads were almost touching to catch the scribe's words.

"They're dissolving," Melek shouted. "Look! They're melting away as soon as they hit the water."

Sure enough, Hulkan's earthen army was disappearing like butter on a hotplate. The little brown figures bobbed for only a second or two after they splashed into the current before vanishing altogether. All that was left of their passing was a muddy



slick that slopped and spilled its messy way into the rapids.

The three recovered by the stream until the last remnants of mud had been swept away. Then they began to pick their way up the bank. Rock-strewn ground gave way eventually to thick undergrowth dotted with a few trees. This, in turn, thickened into a forest.

Suspicious behaviour

The trio made their way towards the trees, their clothes drying on their backs as they walked. As they got undercover, Richard tackled Orkan about his odd behaviour.

"Why didn't you help me against Hulkan? You ran like a mouse," Richard said crossly. Orkan looked shiftily to the side and shrugged. He did not say a word.

"What's happened to you?" Richard asked again, willing Orkan to be all right. He felt a sense of justice run through his mind, as he recalled all the good things Orkan had done since they had met.

Orkan did not reply. Richard shook his head. Kika had been right. There was something wrong with Orkan, but he could not fathom what it was.

A familiar drone interrupted Richard's thoughts. The others heard it too. All three broke into a headlong run. There was no need for discussion. The three companions knew the sound of attacking Grapfrits all too well.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

Look out for these friendly creatures again. They are hiding somewhere in this issue.

In issue 13, they were on page 195.

Life Force Pod

Watch out for the clue that tells you which pod Richard found hidden in Cobra's Keep.

Monsters and Magic

Read about the Treasure Worm and Lakyan on Morbane's story cards. Which of the characters do you think Hulkan is based on?

In issue 13, Dragora was based on the Hydra.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the locator cards and tokens and keep them safe. More will be given at regular intervals. Details about the role-playing game will be given in issue 15.

3-Minute Challenge

Mud Warrior

One of Hulkan's mud warriors is infested with worms. Can you spot him in the mud wall in less than three minutes?

In issue 13, the Path Finder was on page 205.

Puzzle Map

Cut out the puzzle piece and fit it on to your Ancestral World map poster.

Power of Evil

Find the source of the Evil One's power, and win a top of the range Atari computer!

Cut out the letter block. When you have 26 letters, you will get a clue to help you form them into a phrase. Until then, this clue and rhyme will give you something to think about!

Clue

Look on the first page of each issue.

Rhyme

Back through the murky haze of time,
trek from perils last to first.
Trace the days down Richard's path
when first is last, connect the verse.

It won't take long to see the end
where you must then begin again.

Through Orkan's skill and Melek's lore,
the pattern in the tale unfolds.
The Pods are saved from final doom,
the future of the World restored.

It won't take long the end to see
what's right is left, your spirit free.

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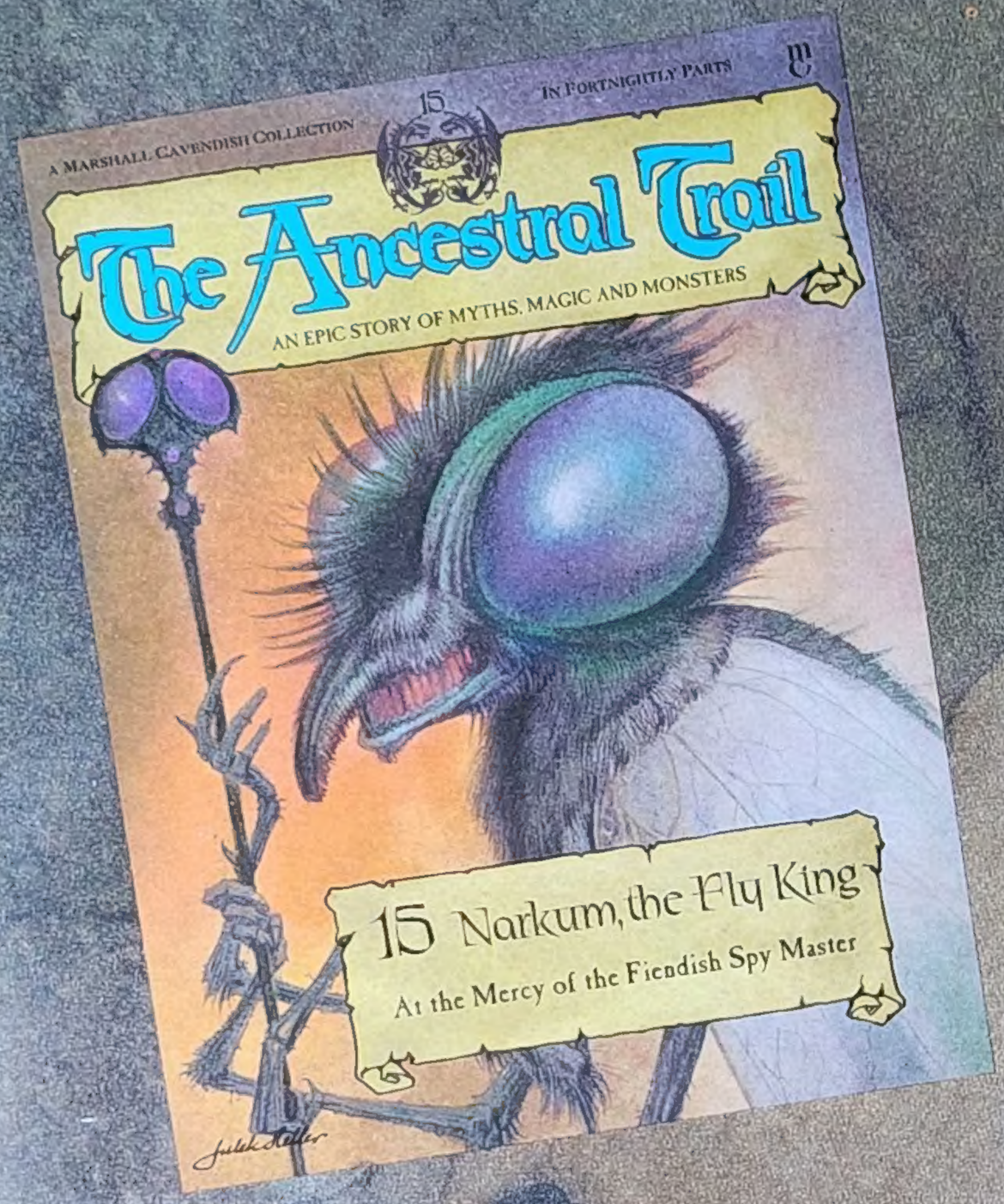
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An Epic Story of Myths, Magic and Monsters
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At the Mercy of the Fiendish Spy Master

In Issue 15

Narkum, the Fly King

Seeking refuge from flying Grapfrits in the Black Forest, our brave trio come under attack again – from another flying army! Will Richard's increasing abilities help him to evade the airborne attack and find the key to the spy master's power?

plus

- Morbane looks at creatures from whom it is impossible to keep a secret. Some will hound their victims to the ends of the earth. Others will report their every deed to powerful sorcerers.

- The first section of **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game instructions.

Coming in Issue 16

Cragmar, Man of Stone

The heroes find a Guardian imprisoned on Plunderer's Peak. But before they can release him, they must overcome his enormous captor!

plus

From Morbane – two stories about brain overcoming brawn • The final section of **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game instructions.

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